

Artwork title: *Do You Dare Disturb The Universe?*

Collaborative partners:

Lisa Jetonne

Kristin Byrd, Ph.D., USGS

Conference Attendees

Artist Lisa Jetonne creates collaborative art projects to engage audiences and participants in the dynamics of decision-making. Recent projects include creating an entire pantry (74 pint, quart, and gallon jars) of marine plastic trash collected by volunteers from Pt. Reyes National Seashore, which she sorted and canned in pickling brine to resemble foodstuffs; installing a one mile-long zipper throughout a 5-story historical residential hotel before it was demolished; a three-month project connecting visitors at a natural history museum to the vast research collection by helping participants create a parallel collection of sculpted specimens; installing a sculpture at a whale-watch overlook which – only when it was sufficiently foggy to obscure the view – revealed to visitors a poem about ancient whales “invisibly” inscribed on the sculpture; and a 21- day project of collaborative sculpture offered to a total audience of thousands of visitors, resulting in a new sculpture each day that reflected the accumulated choices made by participants that day. Visit [lisajetonne.com](http://lisajetonne.com) for more information.

This project’s title is a quote in *Prufrock*, poet T. S. Eliot’s observations of the affect of human frailties on our contemplation of probabilities when decision-making. Offering people a opportunity to work on artwork over time – whether hours or days, in small groups or as individuals – invariably results in unintended results, which no single participant either dictated or predicted, but arise from a “group effect.” While the changes by an individual contribution is immediately obvious and often feels empowering, it is the viewers’ later moments of wonderment at the cumulative group effect that provides crucial meaning.

Typically, when folks are solicited to participate in group art-making, some are confident in their own ability; some are thrilled to be asked (as if they have long waited for such an opportunity); some are hesitant or tentative; some outright reject the notion any contribution of theirs might have value. Some enjoy just observing the process. Rarely does anyone express an expectation the effects of their own contributions will later be extensively altered by choices made by others, or acknowledge they are making changes to previous decisions. Participants returning later to view the finished product are typically dismayed or delighted at the alterations of own contributions – but also almost universally astonished at the overall evolution of the project in collective hands.

*Do You Dare Disturb The Universe?* employs maps of Dr. Byrd's wetland research areas, each map laser cut into the typical birch panel used by painters; each panel mounted on a gimbal. The gimbal can be controlled by levers under the panel; a threshold weight of paint also triggers gimbal movement. Participants paint over/into the laser cut map, employing pipettes and droppers (instead of brushes and knives), with a palette of highly fluid paints of varying specific gravity. Additional changes can be made by adjusting the levers to provoke paint flow. Solid paint additives can also be included, to affect the direction, shape, and flow of the paints and pigments. Despite any alterations in appearance by the painting process, the depth of laser-cut wood helps direct maintain the integrity of the map. Overflow falls into a catch tray under each painting panel. Fresh map panels will be offered each day of the conference, and the number of participants tracked and recorded for each map. One minute and three minute hourglass timers are suspended over the painting table: any onlooker wishing to participate when the painting table is fully occupied can start a timer (one minute for an individual participant; three minutes for a group making painting decisions) to prevent any monopolizing of the decision-making.

Individual participants (or groups of participants) are forced make an assortment of choices when painting: pigment, fluid paint or medium, dry additives, which size pipette, number of drops, placement on the map, lever movement, and so on. While each contribution reflects a unique set of decisions, the accumulated nature of them is dynamic. Outcome cannot be fully controlled, reversed, or predicted. Whether we're bystanders or participants or project designers, the best we can do is observe, record, judge in the moment, coach, suggest, take action, plan, and then dare to try again.